

INDICTMENTS CITE 15 ON ARSON CHARGES

Smashing of a Fire-for-Profit Ring Claimed by District Attorneys

for Brooklyn and Bronx

By **JOSEPH P. FRIED**

The District Attorneys of Brooklyn and the Bronx declared yesterday that they had smashed New York City's biggest arson-for-profit ring involving landlords and announced the indictment of 15 men.

The men were charged with burning eight apartment buildings and conspiring to burn 10 others over the last four years.

Seven of the eight buildings actually set afire were occupied at the time of the arson, although there were no fatalities. Minor injuries were suffered by a total of six firemen at two of the blazes, the officials said.

Thirteen of those indicted were described as landlords or people involved in various aspects of the real estate business. The two others were believed to be "torches" — people who actually set the fires — according to the District Attorneys, Eugene Gold of Brooklyn and Mario Merola of the Bronx.

A Yearlong Investigation

Mr. Gold and Mr. Merola held a news conference in Brooklyn to announce the results of a joint yearlong investigation by their offices and the Police Department's Arson and Explosion Division. They said the investigation was "this city's most comprehensive joint effort to find the perpetrators of arson for profit."

One of those indicted was Bruce Elliott, a 35-year-old attorney and former chairman of Community Board 15 in Brooklyn. Mr. Elliott, who was described as a partner in various property holdings, was charged with arson, conspiracy to commit arson, presenting a false insurance claim, reckless endangerment and attempted grand larceny.

The charges stem from a fire at a Harlem building and from alleged conspiracies, which were thwarted, to set fires at three other buildings — in the Bronx and in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn. Crown Heights is not one of the areas covered by the community board that Mr. Elliott once headed. That community board represents such solid middle-class Brooklyn neighborhoods as Sheepshead Bay and Manhattan Beach, where Mr. Elliott lives.

Mr. Elliott could not be reached for comment yesterday because, like most of the others indicted, he was still in custody late in the day, pending arraignment on the charges against him.

Facing Another Arson Trial

Another of those indicted, on charges similar to those facing Mr. Elliott, was Joseph Bald, 51, of Far Rockaway, Queens. He was named in alleged schemes involving fires or planned fires involving buildings in Crown Heights, Harlem and the West Bronx. Mr. Bald is also scheduled to go on trial tomorrow in another arson case in Queens.

Mr. Bald's attorney, Jay Goldberg, said his client denied the accusations in yesterday's indictment. In 1971, Mr. Bald pleaded guilty to charges that he had participated with an aide of Senator Hiram L. Fong of Hawaii in a conspiracy to quash a Federal stock fraud case that allegedly involved organized crime. He was sentenced to four months in prison in that case.

At the news conference in Mr. Gold's office, the District Attorneys charged that the motives of the alleged arson schemes were to collect the fire insurance on the buildings and then apply for government subsidies and loans to rehabilitate the properties in highly profitable ventures. Mr. Merola contended that the practices of insurance companies and Federal housing agencies inadvertently fostered such schemes.

The others indicted were two men who allegedly set the fires, Jose Ayala and Edwin Garcia, and the following real-estate people: Chaim Fruchter, Harry Rosen, Abraham Slochowsky, Raphael Sperlin, Samuel Biller, David Gomberg, David Kaye, Kenneth Passafume, William Rosen, Ernest Conforte and Robert Schindelman. None of them could be reached for comment.

Other neighborhoods involved in the alleged plots were in the South Bronx, East New York and Brooklyn and on the West Side of Manhattan.